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# Iraq: Implications of a Change in Regime

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An Intelligence Assessment

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NESA 85-10002  
January 1985

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# **Iraq: Implications of a Change in Regime**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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This paper was prepared by [ ] Office of  
Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with a  
contribution by [ ] of the Office of  
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Directorate of Operations. [ ]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
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**Iraq: Implications  
of a Change in Regime**

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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 18 December 1984  
was used in this report.*

The removal from power of Iraqi President Saddam Husayn almost certainly would be detrimental to US interests in the region. The severity of the damage to US interests would range from mild if the ruling Ba'th Party retained power, to severe if Iranian-backed Shia radicals were to seize control.

Any successor regime, particularly one following a coup, probably would face greater internal instability because it would lack Saddam's firm control of the levers of power. A new government would have to deal with infighting among the ruling elite, renewed fighting by Kurdish rebels, and the growth of subversive political movements, including the Communist Party of Iraq and Shia fundamentalist groups. The unrest would provide ample opportunities for exploitation by foreign states, including the USSR.

In the event of Saddam's natural death or assassination—the greatest threat to the Iraqi President—a collegial type of leadership would initially emerge because no leader has a sufficiently strong power base to rule alone. Saddam's successors, if civilian and Ba'thist, probably would retain his main policy goals of ending the conflict with Iran and increasing oil exports to finance economic development. Under a civilian regime:

- Iraq would maintain good working relations with the United States to ensure Washington's continued support for curtailing arms sales to Iran and Iranian oil exports. Saddam's successors, however, probably would be wary of vigorously pursuing his policy of seeking improved ties with the United States because of criticism from ideological hardliners in the party.
- Baghdad probably would continue close military and economic relations with the USSR, Iraq's principal arms supplier, but suspicion and resentment of the Soviets will encourage continued purchases of Western arms and a gradual reduction of dependence on the USSR.
- Ba'thist military officers would regain much of the political influence they lost under Saddam.

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If Saddam is ousted by a coup, the new leadership—heavily military—is likely to follow policies more adverse to the United States than those of civilian Ba'athists:

- It probably would advocate military rather than political means to bring Iran to the bargaining table.
- A military regime probably would be less interested in improving or even maintaining good relations with the United States and might find the United States a convenient scapegoat for Iraqi problems.
- Soviet influence might increase because of the weakness of the regime, but Iraq would still seek alternative arms suppliers.

A revolution is unlikely unless Iran wins a decisive military victory. In that event, Tehran probably would impose a Shia-dominated puppet government in Baghdad based on the Iranian model. The new government would depend upon Iranian occupation forces to survive and would probably face considerable armed resistance. Strong differences also are likely to emerge among Iraq's radical Shia leaders, undercutting the effectiveness of an Iraqi-Iranian alliance.

A Shia-dominated state would at least initially follow policies dictated by its masters in Tehran:

- The two countries would try to subvert moderate Arab regimes allied with the United States, particularly Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the smaller Persian Gulf states.
- Iraq would also put increased pressure on Syria to take a more aggressive posture toward Israel.
- Ties with the United States almost certainly would be severed, and those with the USSR greatly weakened.

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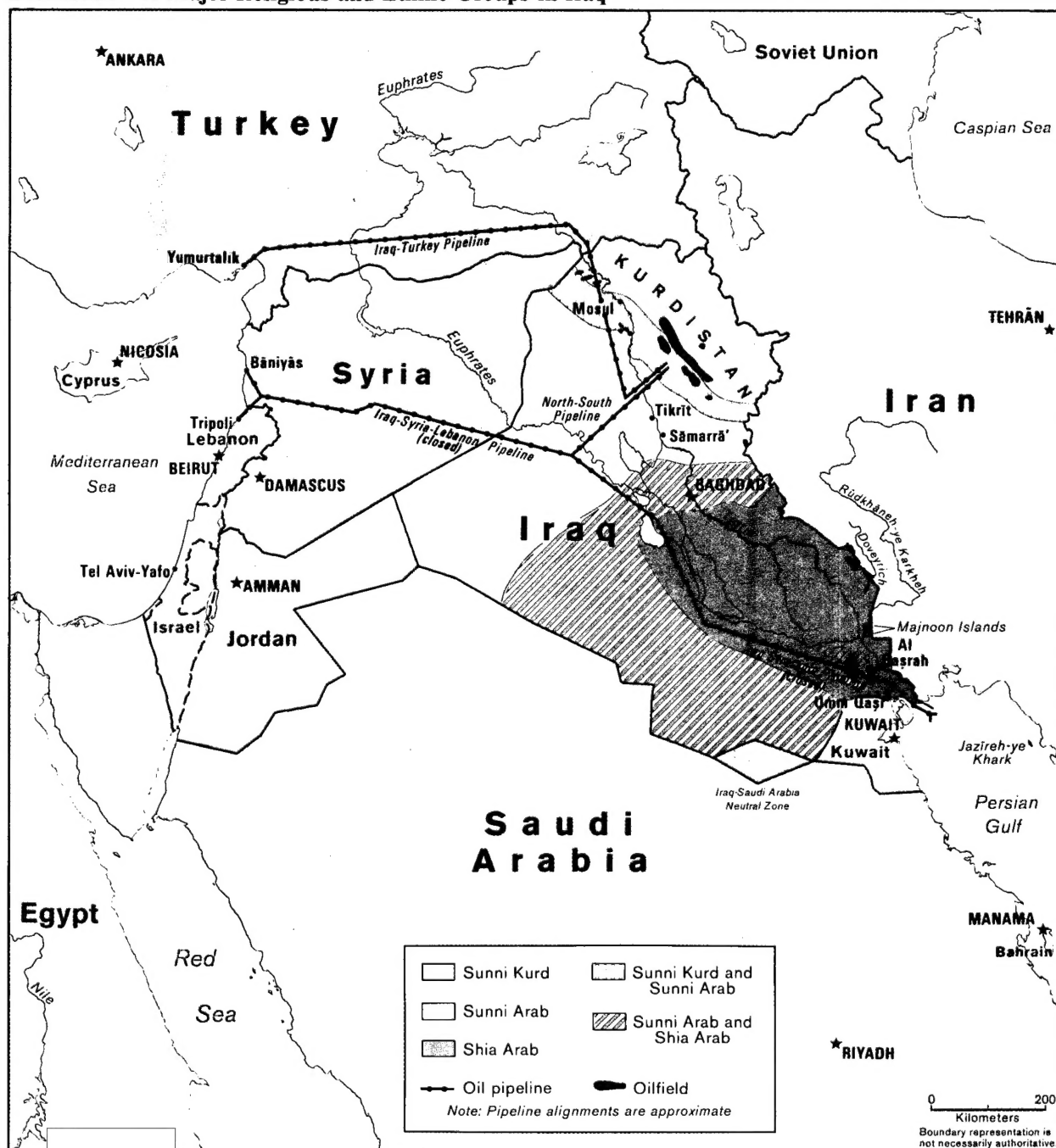
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**Contents**

	<i>Page</i>
<b>Key Judgments</b>	iii
Assassination	1
Dynamics of a Ba'thist Succession	2
Effect on Iraqi Policies	2
Implications for the United States	3
Coup	4
Policies	5
Implications for the United States	5
A Shia-Based Revolution	6
Policies of a Shia Regime	7
Implications for the United States	7
 <b>Appendix</b>	
Leading Personalities	11

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## Distribution of Major Religious and Ethnic Groups in Iraq



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## Iraq: Implications of a Change in Regime

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The relative stability that Iraq has enjoyed for the past 10 years rests largely on one man—President Saddam Husayn. We believe that his skillful manipulation of the dominant Ba'th Party, security services, Army, and government bureaucracy has given him a firm grip on power. Saddam has ruthlessly quashed challenges to his rule, and potential opponents have been largely intimidated by his effective security forces, according to the US Interests Section. He so far has weathered the four-year-old conflict with Iran, a war that he initiated and that for a time appeared to pose a major threat to his survival. Instead, the conflict has strengthened his position.

by his bodyguards and security forces. A recent Western interviewer of Saddam was struck by the tight security surrounding him and the almost obsessive concern with possible assassination attempts.

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Saddam has not named a successor, nor has he signaled a favorite publicly. If Saddam is assassinated or dies of natural causes, Iraq's Constitution specifies that the nine-member Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), Iraq's highest ruling body, is to appoint a replacement. The RCC is dominated by civilian members of the ruling Ba'th Party.

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We believe that, even if faced with an Iranian military victory, Saddam will not voluntarily relinquish the political power he has fought so hard to obtain. Illness is not likely to sideline him, since he is only 47 and appears to be in good health. He works long hours despite occasional flareups from a ruptured disc that causes severe pain in his lower back and weakness in his legs. In recent years, a back brace appears to have corrected many earlier problems.

In our judgment, the most likely candidates to succeed Saddam are Izzat Ibrahim, vice chairman of the RCC, and First Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yasin Ramadan, RCC member and leader of the Ba'th Party militia. Each would have a strong claim to leadership because of his years in high government and Ba'th posts:

- We believe that Ibrahim, number two in the party structure, is a primary contender because other Ba'thist leaders probably view him as more amenable to collegial rule and less likely to build a personal power base than Ramadan. Ibrahim is widely known for his devotion to Sunni Islam, a factor that may appeal to Ba'thists seeking to blunt criticism of their secular rule. The US Interests Section reports that Ibrahim has a chronic heart problem, but this may be a factor in his favor. In our judgment, his poor health may make him an attractive candidate to other Ba'thist leaders hoping to build their power base while Ibrahim serves as a weak interim ruler.

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### Assassination

The greatest threat to Saddam's rule, in our judgment, comes from assassination.

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Saddam's half-brother Barzan, former head of the Iraqi Intelligence Service, publicly acknowledged in 1981 that there had been seven attempts on Saddam's life since the Ba'thist coup in 1968.

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In the most recent incidents, the Dawa Party, the main Iraqi Shia dissident organization, tried to kill Saddam in May 1981 and July 1982.

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While Saddam escaped injury, several of his entourage were killed in each attempt. With Iran apparently preparing for a drawn-out war of attrition, Dawa or other Iranian-backed dissidents probably will redouble their efforts to assassinate him, in our judgment. Saddam rarely appears in public and then only in settings carefully screened



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- Ramadan, [ ] is the second most powerful man in the government. He is the most publicized personality in Iraq after Saddam. His command of the People's Army, the Ba'th Party's militia that has about 200,000 troops on active duty and a much larger number of reserves, gives Ramadan additional weight if the succession struggle turns violent. The militia, however, is no match for the armed forces or the security services, in our judgment. Ramadan, who is from Mosul, has strong political ambitions that we believe other leaders distrust. Tikritis, the President's clan, are probably particularly suspicious of Ramadan. Many Tikritis hold important security posts and could be expected to oppose him. [ ]

like Ramadan were to head the government, the Tikritis probably would continue to exert considerable influence. The Tikritis, however, are far from monolithic and probably could not agree on a single leader to represent them. In that event, we believe that Saddam's half brothers, Barzan and Sab'awi al-Tikriti, who were purged from the Iraqi Intelligence Service in 1983, might try to reexert their authority. [ ]

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In the absence of a united civilian Ba'th Party leadership following the assassination of Saddam, we believe the military would gain increasing power, particularly as long as the war with Iran continued. Iraqi military officers played significant roles in national leadership until Saddam gradually assumed control, leading to the resignation in 1979 of President Ahmad al-Bakr, an Army general. Saddam has carefully worked to put the military under civilian control, and the RCC now contains no career military officers except for Minister of Defense Adnan Khayrallah. This is likely to change should Saddam be assassinated, and we would expect the military to gain increased influence in policy decisions. [ ]

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Minister of Defense Adnan Khayrallah, deputy commander of the armed forces and RCC member, is a darkhorse candidate. His strength lies in his membership in the Tikriti clan and close ties to Saddam, who is his cousin and brother-in-law. Khayrallah is unpopular among military personnel who view him as a political appointee. [ ]

[ ] Khayrallah, in our judgment, may nonetheless be preferred by other Tikritis, who would hope to manipulate him and deny the office of president to anyone not from their clan. [ ]

**Dynamics of a Ba'thist Succession.** Whether the successor is Ibrahim, Ramadan, or Khayrallah, no single leader is likely to emerge with sufficient power to rule independently of the others, in our judgment. Saddam's several purges have removed potential challengers from the party and the military. In a post-Saddam era, the leadership almost certainly will be a coalition of Ba'thist civilian and military leaders. Gen. Hisham Sabah al-Fakhri, a leading Iraqi military commander with longstanding Ba'th Party connections who is now Deputy Chief of Staff for Army Operations, probably will play an important role. We believe that important Tikritis, such as Sa'dun Shakir, the Minister of Interior; Fadhil al-Barraq, head of the Iraqi Intelligence Service; and Ali Hasan al-Majid, Chief of the Directorate of Public Security, could be expected to maneuver for power as well. [ ]

**Effect on Iraqi Policies.** In our judgment, Ba'thist successors such as Ibrahim or Ramadan initially would follow the general thrust of Saddam's current foreign and domestic policies. They share Saddam's concern about maintaining internal stability, ending the war, and resuming oil exports to finance economic development. Baghdad would continue diplomatic efforts to curtail Western military and civilian trade with Iran. The influence of the military probably would increase, expressed in a more aggressive pursuit of military options. [ ]

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[ ] military officers are upset that Iraq is relying on diplomatic initiatives. We believe that Baghdad might accelerate the rate of attacks on Iranian oil shipping and on land facilities, possibly including Jazireh-ye Khark (Khark Island). Iraqi civilian leaders also might be tempted to go along with a hardline military policy to end the war and shore up their political position. [ ]

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Members of the Tikriti clan would resist efforts to wrest from them the security forces that are the key to their influence, in our judgment. Even if a non-Tikriti

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Relations with Syria are likely to improve somewhat upon the removal of Saddam, Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad's archrival. Iraqi leaders lacking Saddam's intense personal animosity toward Assad are more likely to paper over differences with Damascus and perhaps persuade it to reopen Iraq's oil pipeline across Syria, which has been closed since 1982. The improvement of ties with Syria would probably lead to a sharpening of Iraq's position on the Arab-Israeli dispute as Baghdad provided greater diplomatic and propaganda support for Damascus. Still, suspicions of the rival Syrian Ba'th Party run deep in Iraq for its support for Iran and past efforts to stage coups in Baghdad. So long as the threat from Iran continues, we would expect the Iraqis to be careful not to alienate the United States. [ ]

Iraq and setting back, at least temporarily, the trend toward improved US-Iraqi relations. The weaker a successor regime, the more likely it would be to avoid actions that could be construed as collusion with the United States. Our knowledge of the highly secretive Ba'thist hierarchy is sketchy, but we see indications of longstanding opposition within the party to moderating Iraqi policy. We would expect hardliners among the new leaders in time to espouse policies directed against Arab moderates in the region with strong US ties. [ ]

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Until the war with Iran ends, however, a Ba'thist-ruled Iraq probably will continue to view as vital US support for its diplomatic efforts to curtail Western arms sales to Iran. We would not expect a significant decline in relations with the United States unless the Israelis performed an act, such as an airstrike against an Arab state, that greatly angered the Arab world. Iraqis would see the United States as behind the incident, and the Ba'thist leadership probably would prefer to put distance between itself and the United States. Similarly, until the war is over, Baghdad will want to maintain reasonably good working relations with Jordan and its other moderate Arab allies. [ ]

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After the war, relations with the United States will face greater obstacles because Iraq will have less need for US support, and US backing of Israel will loom as a larger obstacle to improved relations, in our judgment. Moreover, Iraq's ambitions in the Gulf and efforts to claim a greater leadership role in the Arab world and the Nonaligned Movement are likely to increase friction with the United States. We believe that less secure Ba'thist leaders would be unlikely to risk increased domestic criticism by advocating significantly improved relations with the United States. [ ]

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Iraqi moderation is in large part the result of obtaining increased internal stability, according to a US diplomat. We believe that, faced with greater opposition at home, the Ba'thists, who achieved power as a

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25X1 We believe that Iraq would seek continued good ties with the USSR, especially if Deputy Prime Minister Ramadan becomes President. US diplomats believe that he favors closer ties to the Soviets. Ramadan frequently serves as Saddam's special emissary to the USSR and has had only limited exposure to the West. Ramadan held his first meetings with US officials last year. The greater influence of Iraq's military over policymaking probably will also be reflected in increased demands for Soviet arms. [ ]

25X1 Ramadan, however, is a strong nationalist and tough bargainer who probably would maintain Iraq's independent policies. The Iraqis are at odds with Moscow over Soviet support for the outlawed Iraqi Communist Party and Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. We believe that these differences will continue under a successor regime. Baghdad also harbors considerable mistrust and resentment toward the Soviets because of their refusal to supply arms during the first year of the Iran-Iraq war. [ ]

25X1 [ ] In our judgment, Iraq is likely to resume efforts to diversify its arms suppliers once increased oil sales replenish its treasury. Ramadan also has been in charge of Iraq's economic development for much of his career, an area where the Iraqis clearly prefer Western equipment. [ ]

25X1 **Implications for the United States.** We believe Saddam's replacement by another Ba'thist would harm US interests in the region by increasing instability in

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clandestine party in a ruthless fight against Communist and government opposition, will revert to the tactics that brought them success. We would expect the new leaders to employ terrorism and even greater repression of their foes to retain power. [ ]

#### Coup

We believe that a Ba'th Party or military coup—a frequent route to power in Iraq—is the next most likely threat. Such a takeover is unlikely so long as the war continues, unless senior Ba'thist leaders conclude that Saddam's removal is necessary for their own survival and would satisfy Iranian conditions for a cease-fire. So far, Iran's insistence that the entire Ba'th Party, not just Saddam, would have to go has caused the party leadership to draw closer together rather than single Saddam out as a scapegoat.<sup>1</sup> [ ]

We believe that disgruntlement over Saddam's pre-eminence and the consequent erosion of Ba'th Party authority is not sufficient to spark a coup. [ ]

[ ] resentment in Ba'thist ranks over the concentration of power in the hands of Saddam, his relatives, and other clansmen from his hometown of Tikrit. In 1979, however, Saddam executed 21 Ba'thist "plotters" and imprisoned 33 more for allegedly advocating democratic party elections for the presidency, according to the US Interests Section, and this ended open opposition to Saddam within the party. In 1983, Saddam also purged Iraq's main security service, the Iraqi Intelligence Service, in part because he suspected its former chief, his half brother Barzan, of disloyalty, [ ]

Saddam's tight control of the country's numerous security services makes a successful coup extremely difficult. [ ]

Saddam loyalists include the following: Minister of Interior Sa'dun Shakir; head of the Iraqi Intelligence Service, Fadhil al-Barraq; Director of Military Intelligence Mahmud Shakir Shahin; Director of Public

<sup>1</sup> Senior Iranian Government officials occasionally suggest that the removal of Saddam alone will suffice to end the war. A careful reading of the statements of senior Iranian clerics—who hold the real power over Iranian war policy—indicates they have never changed their basic condition for ending the war—destruction of the Iraqi Ba'th Party and establishment of an Iraqi Islamic republic. [ ]

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Security Ali Hasan al-Majid; Director of the Presidential Intelligence Service Husayn Kamal al-Majid; and Izzat Ibrahim and Adnan Khayrallah, who run the powerful Military Bureau of the Ba'th Party's Regional Command. We believe that Saddam uses the various security services to check on their political ambitions and reporting accuracy. [ ]

Equally important, the security services have created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion that has intimidated the populace and weakened opposition to Saddam's rule, according to US diplomats. [ ]

[ ] the Directorate of Political Guidance in the Ministry of Defense, which we believe is controlled by the Military Bureau of the party, ruthlessly weeds out suspect military officers and rotates and transfers officers every few years to prevent commanders from building a personal following. [ ] political guidance officers bypass the normal military chain of command and report directly to the Directorate of Guidance. Within the Ba'th Party, Saddam has assigned security officers down to middle-level units, [ ]

Military officers probably are reluctant to move against Saddam during the war because they fear that a coup would weaken Iraq's ability to resist an Iranian invasion and lead to their ouster, too. Taking no chances, Saddam has launched an elaborate personality cult to identify himself with the war effort and personify Iraqi nationalism against the traditional Persian threat. [ ]

[ ] military officers from the Mosul area as a potential political threat. These officers include two Army deputy chiefs of staff and at least two division commanders. [ ]

[ ] the director of Saddam's Presidential Guard said that several prominent Sunni citizens from Mosul had spoken openly against Saddam in early 1982 when the war was going badly for Iraq. The director, a Tikriti, said that security officials had previously considered Sunni leaders in Mosul to be solidly behind the regime. [ ]

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[ ] some military officers believe that their counterparts from Mosul are more loyal to other members of their clique than to the military command structure or the ruling Ba'th Party to which they belong. We have no evidence that these officers are disloyal to Saddam, but they could play a role in a coup attempt if Deputy Prime Minister Ramadan, who also is from Mosul, were to make a bid for power. [ ]

balance against the Soviets. It would be unlikely to improve the relationship and probably would authorize more hostile coverage of the United States in Iraqi news media. [ ]

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**Policies.** A successful coup would probably result in a more radical break from Saddam's policies than if he died naturally or were assassinated. The drastic move of replacing Saddam during the war probably would reflect profound dissatisfaction with its conduct and concern that the lives of the coup plotters were at stake. If the coup were led by middle-level, professional, non-Ba'thist military officers, Iraq might sharply escalate its pressure on Iran in the Gulf. On the other hand, should the coup be led by senior civilian Ba'th Party officials and senior Ba'thist military officers, we believe Baghdad probably would press hard for peace negotiations in the hope that Saddam's removal would satisfy Tehran. [ ]

We believe that Saudi Arabia, the smaller Gulf states, and Jordan would fear that Iraq might revert to its old radicalism. Syria, Libya, and South Yemen, on the other hand, would seek to improve relations for the same reason. The military wing of the Syrian Ba'th Party that rules in Damascus would be encouraged that Iraq's military was dominating the civilian wing of the Ba'th Party for the first time since the mid-1970s. In our judgment, should Damascus reopen the Iraqi pipeline across Syria and permit Iraq to import supplies through Syrian ports, Iraq's dependence on financial and logistic support from Arab moderates would be reduced, permitting a further radicalization of Iraqi foreign policy. [ ]

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Although Iraq's new leaders probably would be long-time Ba'thists familiar with the party's blend of ideology and pragmatism, they would lack experience in foreign affairs. They probably would proceed cautiously and would not immediately change Iraq's basic alignments with the superpowers or Arab moderates, particularly during the war. A military-led government is likely to have mixed feelings toward the Soviet Union. Thousands of Iraqi officers have been trained in the USSR, and most middle-level Iraqi officers have been subjected to heavy propaganda depicting the United States as the enemy of Iraq. At the same time, Iraqi military officers are strongly nationalistic, and [ ] they are resentful and suspicious of the Soviets. The likely instability of a military regime probably would make it susceptible to pressures for a more pro-Soviet foreign policy and more concessions to the Communist Party of Iraq. Iraq's military also will seek to maintain good relations with the Soviets to assure the continued flow of modern arms. [ ]

We believe that coup plotting and coups—endemic in Iraq before Saddam gained control—would continue and perhaps escalate unless Saddam's successor proves to be his equal in ruthlessness and cunning. The new leadership probably would have to deal with increased subversive activity by civilian and military Ba'thists, as well as non-Ba'thist dissidents emboldened by Saddam's overthrow. We believe that the regime would respond with brutal repression. Nonetheless, Kurdish nationalists, Shia and Kurdish Communists, and Shia fundamentalists would benefit from infighting in the security services and armed forces and from intrigues among leading Ba'thists. The unrest would probably be considerably greater following a coup because the security structure would be weakened by purges of Saddam loyalists. We believe that Iraq's Communists, now almost moribund, and Shia fundamentalists both might be able to begin making inroads among lower-class Iraqis if there were a weak government in Baghdad. [ ]

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**Implications for the United States.** A military regime in Baghdad probably would be more damaging to US interests than a civilian succession because Iraq's domestic situation and foreign policy would reflect its

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The new Iraqi leadership probably would retain a working relationship with the United States as a

greater weaknesses and insecurity. Increased instability would provide greater opportunity for Iranian, Soviet, and Syrian exploitation. We believe that government repression would not be as effective because of greater infighting among the ruling elite and widespread opposition. [ ]

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We believe that Iraq's foreign policies would be similar to those under civilian rule but somewhat more adverse to the United States. The military leadership would be more likely to escalate the war in the Gulf to bring Iran to the peace table. The United States could be drawn into the conflict if Iran responds by attacking the oil facilities of Iraq's Gulf allies or closes the Strait of Hormuz. Internal weakness would impede stronger ties to Washington, particularly after the war, when US support would not be so critical. A weaker Iraq would be less of a counterweight to Iranian efforts to dominate the Gulf. [ ]

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#### A Shia-Based Revolution

In our judgment, no group outside the security services, military, and Ba'th Party has the strength and cohesion to stage a successful uprising.<sup>2</sup> Iraq's security services have effectively quelled disturbances and placed agents throughout society. The regime has arrested or deported many suspected Shia sympathizers of Iran and in 1980 executed the leading Iraqi Shia clergyman, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr. It also arrested the ringleaders of Kurdish student demonstrations against military conscription in June 1984, [ ]

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[ ] members of the Shia Dawa Party believe that their clandestine organization is so thoroughly penetrated that attempts to plan demonstrations are futile. [ ]

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Saddam employs an economic carrot to complement the regime's repression. Iraq's per capita income has risen by 700 percent since the Ba'th Party takeover in 1968, and oil-financed development projects have benefited all classes, in our judgment. Shias have enjoyed special attention. The Ba'thists greatly improved utilities and educational facilities in the large [ ]

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Shia slum in Baghdad, [ ] They also have refurbished important Shia religious shrines in southern Iraq.<sup>3</sup> [ ]

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We believe that a decisive military defeat would open the way for Iran to impose a Shia-controlled government in Baghdad patterned after the Islamic Republic of Iran. Senior Iranian religious leaders have indicated that, in the event of an Iranian victory, Iran and Iraq would remain separate countries, but both would follow the "line of the Imam." Moreover, because the major Shia shrines are in Iraq, we believe that many Iranian clerics would move there and would become involved in Iraqi politics. [ ]

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Tehran has established the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), an umbrella organization for Iraqi Shia opposition groups headquartered in Iran that functions as an Iraqi government-in-exile. [ ] SAIRI is controlled by representatives from the Iranian President's office, the Revolutionary Guard, the Prime Minister's office, and the Ministry of Interior. Tehran has pressed Iraqi opposition groups based in Iran to accept control by SAIRI. Opposition groups that fail to join are denied access to military training and cannot gain permission to print propaganda, [ ] Moreover, the Iranians are trying to form new organizations of dissident Iraqi Shias to supplant recalcitrant groups opposed to Iranian domination, [ ]

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A Shia fundamentalist regime in Baghdad, in our judgment, could remain in power only through the presence of large numbers of Iranian troops. Unlike the Iranian revolution, the takeover in Iraq would not have the broad support of the population. In addition to resistance from Iraqi Sunnis, [ ] widespread opposition among Shias in Iraq to the doctrine espoused by Iran that Ayatollah Khomeini is the supreme religious and secular guide of all Shia believers. The enmity of many Iraqi Shias [ ]

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toward Iran also has been heightened by their participation in military service and the fact that Iranian Shias are Persians, while Iraqi Shias are Arabs. We believe that Iraqi Shias would see a new regime led by SAIRI spokesman Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim or another pliable Iraqi cleric as an Iranian creation. Moreover, Shia opposition activists are factionalized among Iraqi loyalists, supporters of SAIRI, and independent oppositionists. [ ]

In our judgment, Iraq's new leaders also would turn their attention to Israel. Tehran has declared that Iraq is on the road to Israel and that Jordan and Syria are the next steps on that path. The Shia governments in Tehran and Baghdad would call on Amman and Damascus to oust the Israelis and would seek to undercut their Islamic credentials for failing to comply. They probably would back dissident Islamic groups seeking to overthrow Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad and Jordan's King Hussein. The Iraqi and Iranian armies, however, probably would be in no shape for battles requiring lengthy supply lines. Moreover, Tehran's revolutionary doctrine calls for Muslim masses, not armies, to oust un-Islamic rulers. [ ]

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Faced with a hostile Iran and Iraq, Syria and Jordan probably would paper over their differences and draw closer. Syria might harbor and support Iraqi dissidents seeking to overthrow the pro-Iranian government in Baghdad. Syria probably would move to undercut Iranian-backed Shia elements in Lebanon. [ ]

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We believe, however, that strong differences between Baghdad and Tehran would eventually emerge. Iraqi animosity toward Iran is deeply rooted, as are the essentially Arab character and orientation of the Iraqis. In our judgment, even a pro-Iranian government in Baghdad would chafe under strict direction by Iran's clerics. [ ] many Iraqi clerics already resent Tehran's pretensions to leadership of Iraq. Iraqi leaders would oppose some Iranian policies, if only to blunt criticism for being Iranian cat's-paws. [ ]

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**Implications for the United States.** An Iraqi Shia regime, working with Iran, would directly challenge the interests of the United States and pro-US moderate Arab states in the region. US relations with Baghdad's clerical rulers would resemble those now existing with Tehran. Baghdad would be hostile to the United States and would encourage—or at least not restrain—mob violence against any US presence in Iraq. [ ]

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25X1 Even if Iraq's Shias proved quiescent, the new government probably would face considerable armed resistance from the outset. Remnants of Iraq's military would join forces with Sunni civilians in major cities, in our judgment. Secular political groupings, including Kurdish factions, Ba'thists, and Communists, would oppose the regime clandestinely and conduct guerrilla actions. Small arms would be readily available from the disintegrating Iraqi Army, and arms long have been abundant in Kurdistan. We believe that the Iranian-supported Shia regime probably would establish popular paramilitary organizations modeled after the Revolutionary Guard in Iran to put down the dissidence, but resistance could continue for years. [ ]

25X1 **Policies of a Shia Regime.** We believe that, at least initially, policies of the new government would reflect those of its Iranian neighbors. Iraq would become stridently anti-US and hostile to US friends in the Middle East. We believe that Baghdad would join forces with Iran and seek to install Islamic republics throughout the Muslim world, concentrating first on the smaller Gulf states and Saudi Arabia. The new regime, however, probably would expend limited energy and resources in the effort, at least initially, because of the strong armed resistance it faced at home. [ ]

25X1 Iraq and Iran probably would concentrate their initial efforts against Kuwait to exploit the large Shia community there—30 percent of the native population. We believe that Kuwait would try to accommodate Iran and Iraq by becoming increasingly anti-US while trying to draw closer to Saudi Arabia. Riyadh would be faced with either coming to the defense of Kuwait and the other Gulf states or standing by as Iran and Iraq subverted them. [ ]

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**Iraq's Ethnic Divisions**

*Iraq's predominantly Muslim society is characterized by deep ethnic and sectarian divisions. Arabs, 71 percent of the population, inhabit the central and southern plains, and Kurds, 20 percent of the population, live in the northern mountains. Turkomans and Arab Christians make up the remaining 9 percent. The Arabs are divided between the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam, and the Kurds are split by longstanding tribal enmities.* [ ]

**Shias**

*Shias are in the majority, constituting some 55 percent of the population. We estimate that Shias in the military account for 80 percent of Iraqi enlisted men and perhaps 60 percent of the junior officers.* [ ]

*The Shias have long resented political and economic domination by Iraq's Sunnis, according to academic sources. Despite Ba'thist efforts to direct greater economic and educational opportunities to the Shia community, Shias remain disadvantaged.* [ ] *Shias fleeing poverty in rural areas have swelled Baghdad's population to 3.5 million. Over one-third of Baghdad's population, they are straining social services. Reduced government oil revenues from the war have kept the government from expanding Iraq's welfare programs at the pace of the late 1970s, according to the US Interests Section.* [ ]

*Iraqi Shias have no single leader and are factionalized by the practice of following rival "mujtahids," or spiritual guides, according to scholars of Iraq. The government executed the most respected Shia clergyman, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, in 1980. Many remaining prominent clerics give at least lipservice to Saddam's regime, and all are paid directly by the government.* [ ]

*Iraq's Shias seem more secular than their Iranian coreligionists, according to most scholars. They have largely ignored Iran's call to overthrow the Ba'thist regime. Iraqi Shias have a strong sense of Arab nationalism, and the government has played skillfully on the centuries-old Arab animosity toward Persians.* [ ]

*Shia opposition groups are weak and divided. The largest grouping, the Dawa Party, is headquartered in Tehran, led by Murtadha Askari. Dawa is a member of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, an umbrella organization of Shia and secular opposition groups. Tehran sponsors the Assembly and hopes to establish it as the basis for a government in occupied Iraq.* [ ]

*The Iraqi Government has dealt harshly with those who have responded to Islamic radicalism. Security forces arrested and executed hundreds of Shias and deported thousands more to Iran following a series of sabotage and assassination attempts against Iraqi officials in 1980.* [ ]

**Kurds**

*Iraq's 2.6 million Kurds are in continual rebellion against Baghdad's authority, which they regard as illegitimate. They seek greater autonomy and a larger share of revenues from northern oilfields. Revolts, met by force, are often followed by cease-fires and power-sharing agreements that so far have always broken down, leading to more cycles of violence.* [ ]

*Violence has increased since August as the dissident Kurdish Democratic Party, led by Mas'ud and Idris Barzani, has fought against both government forces and the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led by*

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*Jalal Talabani. Talabani concluded a cease-fire with Baghdad in December 1983, agreeing to release government prisoners and form a border guard of up to 40,000 men, releasing Iraqi regular troops for duty on the front. The agreement with Talabani broke down in October 1984. Talabani's forces have retreated to the mountains and have resumed skirmishing with government forces.* [ ]

Iraq would support radical Islamic causes in the Middle East but probably would be at odds with other Arab radicals, including Syria and Libya, who oppose a Shia regime in Baghdad. The United States and Iraq would often be at loggerheads over Iraq's more militant stance toward Israel. Iraqi-backed terrorism, this time Shia in nature, would threaten US installations and personnel in the Middle East, in our judgment. [ ]

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*We believe that the Kurds lack the arms and manpower to overthrow the government even if the Syrians, Iranians, and Libyans were to increase substantially their support for the rebels. The Kurds, however, could contribute to a weakening of the government that other power centers in Iraq could exploit. Kurdish revolts were instrumental in the overthrow of several Iraqi regimes in the 1960s.* [ ]

A Shia victory in Iraq would create serious problems for the USSR. A religious leadership in Baghdad would be likely to put distance between itself and Moscow, although Iraq's current heavy reliance on Soviet military and technical support makes a complete rupture unlikely. Such a regime might attempt to subvert the current secular leadership in Damascus and, if successful, thereby reduce or eliminate Soviet influence in a state vital to Moscow's position in the Middle East. [ ]

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#### **Arab Sunnis**

*In our judgment, the Arab Sunnis are least likely to rise against a government that they dominate and that favors them. Separate Sunni interest groups, however, are the most likely to stage coups to enhance their power. Regional, tribal, and family ties are stronger than ethnic bonds among most Sunni Arabs.* [ ]

Furthermore, an Iranian leadership emboldened by success in Baghdad and freed from a burdensome war with Iraq might undertake other moves inimical to Soviet interests such as becoming more active in aiding Afghan insurgents. An increased Iranian threat might cause the Arab Gulf states to be more reliant on the United States for security assistance. [ ]

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*the regime of the Arif brothers (November 1963-July 1968) depended heavily on fellow tribesmen and residents from their home region. The Ba'thist leaders who replaced them draw heavily on fellow Tikritis. The Tikritis, in turn, are concerned over the cohesiveness of military officers from the Mosul region,* [ ]

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## Appendix

### Leading Personalities



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**Saddam Husayn, President;  
Chairman, Revolutionary  
Command Council**

Saddam Husayn, President of Iraq and Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council since 1979, is the primary architect of his country's domestic and foreign policy. His political future is inextricably tied to the outcome of the Iran-Iraq war, which he has portrayed in terms of national survival, according to US diplomats. He adopts the "carrot and stick" approach in governing; he has implemented major development projects designed to increase Iraq's standard of living but has ruthlessly suppressed his opponents. Saddam has also fostered a personality cult and a sophisticated propaganda campaign to solidify his hold on power. US diplomats report that he has departed from Ba'th ideology to attain his goals, which include winning Iraq a leadership role in the Arab world and the Nonaligned Movement. He realizes the advantages of balanced ties with the United States and the USSR but is suspicious of both superpowers. [redacted]

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[redacted] pragmatic, shrewd, charismatic, and opportunistic. Saddam, 47, has been involved in politics for nearly 30 years. [redacted]



**Izzat Ibrahim,  
Vice Chairman, Revolutionary  
Command Council; Assistant  
Secretary General, Ba'th  
Party Regional Command**

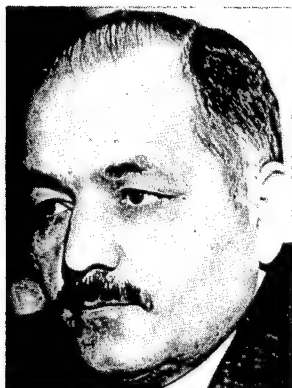
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Izzat Ibrahim, a longtime Saddam loyalist, has occupied the second position in the RCC and Regional Command since July 1979. US diplomats report that as Vice Chairman of the RCC he is responsible for overseeing day-to-day Ba'th Party affairs. They add that Saddam feels comfortable in placing him in such sensitive positions. Ibrahim is respected by the Iraqi people but lacks the ambition, charismatic personality, and independent power base to allow him to challenge the President's rule. He has played a major role in the formulation of Iraq's Persian Gulf policy. Ibrahim is chairman of the Election Commission, which determines the acceptability of National Assembly candidates, and of the party Military Bureau, which monitors military efficiency and loyalty. He has chronic health problems. He is about 42 years old and is a devout Sunni Muslim from Samarra'. [redacted]

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**Taha Yasin Ramadan,  
First Deputy Prime Minister;  
Member, Revolutionary Command  
Council; Commander in Chief,  
People's Army**

The second most important figure in the Iraqi Government, First Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yasin Ramadan oversees the day-to-day operations of the government. US diplomats report that since the late 1970s he has been responsible for developing procedures for implementing policy established by Saddam. [redacted]

[redacted] Ramadan enjoys the President's full confidence. He plays a key role in economic and industrial affairs and often travels abroad as Saddam's official envoy. We agree with the US Interests Section's assessment of Ramadan as a crafty and ambitious politician who would like to be president. He lacks a sufficient power base to challenge Saddam, although he has the support of some sections of the Ba'th Party of Iraq, civil service, and People's Army (the Ba'th Party militia). Ramadan has opposed close ties with the United States, preferring relations with the USSR and its allies. He has been a member of the Regional Command since 1966 and of the RCC since 1969. In 1975, he was named Commander in Chief of the People's Army. He was appointed First Deputy Prime Minister in 1979. Ramadan, about 46, is a native of Mosul. [redacted]

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**Adnan Khayrallah,  
Deputy Prime Minister;  
Minister of Defense; Deputy  
Commander in Chief, Armed  
Forces; Member, Revolutionary  
Command Council**

A cousin and brother-in-law of Saddam, Staff Gen. Adnan Khayrallah owes his positions to his family connections. A US diplomat says that Khayrallah plays no role in formulating military policy but instead ensures the military's loyalty to the government. [redacted] Khayrallah is not popular among high-level military officers, [redacted]

[redacted] He is also a symbol of political interference in military affairs because of his appointments of Ba'thists and relatives to military commands early in the Iran-Iraq war. Although Khayrallah is a career Army officer, his only unit command was a tank regiment during the mid-1970s. [redacted]

[redacted] he prefers Western arms to Soviet-made weapons. He has been Defense Minister and a member of the RCC and Regional Command since 1977. In 1979, he was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Commander in Chief. Khayrallah, about 44, suffers from a chronic back ailment. [redacted]

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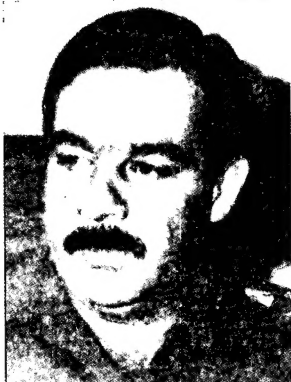
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**Hisham Sabah al-Fakhri,  
Deputy Chief of Staff  
for Operations**

Maj. Gen. Hisham Sabah al-Fakhri is one of the most powerful men in the armed forces. As Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations since January 1984, Fakhri participates in strategic military decision making and enjoys Saddam's trust. Considered a war hero by the Iraqi public, he is feared and respected by his staff, [redacted]. Fakhri made errors that led to serious Iraqi defeats in 1982, but a year later he won two major victories along the Doveyrich River. Since February 1984, Fakhri has also commanded the East of Tigris Command, which halted the Iranian invasion north of Al Basrah but failed to recapture the Majnoon Islands. A Ba'thist since the mid-1960s, he is the last surviving active-duty Army officer who participated in the coup in 1968 that brought the Ba'thists to power. He was elected to the Regional Command in 1982. During late 1983, Fakhri served briefly as director of the Iraqi Intelligence Service, presiding over its reorganization and purge. A native of Mosul, he is in his mid-forties. [redacted]

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**Sa'dun Shakir,  
Minister of Interior**

A longtime Ba'thist, Sa'dun Shakir has been involved in Ba'th Party security operations for nearly 25 years. As Interior Minister (since 1979), he oversees Iraq's ubiquitous internal security apparatus. [redacted] Saddam's trust and confidence in Shakir date to their revolutionary days. [redacted] Shakir is virulently anti-Communist and distrusts the Soviets; he has close ties with Palestinian terrorist groups. During 1968-77, Shakir directed the Intelligence Service and its predecessor organization, the Public Relations Bureau. He has been a member of the RCC and Regional Command since 1977. Shakir, about 45, is of Tikriti origin and has a law degree. [redacted]

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**Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim,  
Leader, Supreme Assembly of  
the Islamic Revolution in Iraq**

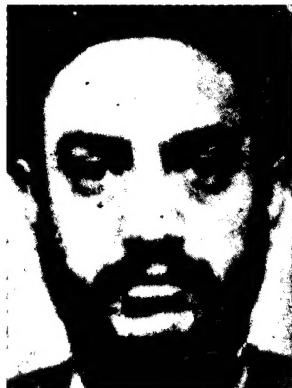
Hojat-ol Eslam Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim is the middle son of the Dawa Party's founder, the late Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, and is the most powerful and influential leader within the Iraqi Shia opposition movement. A middle-level cleric, he seeks to establish an Iranian-style religious state. In December 1982, Khomeini chose Muhammad to head the newly established Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq that Khomeini has picked to rule in Baghdad after Saddam is defeated. [redacted] most Iranian funding of the Iraqi opposition goes directly to Muhammad, thus increasing his power and Iran's influence with Dawa. He also recruits Iraqi prisoners of war and refugees in Iran to support his cause. [redacted] al-though Muhammad and Khomeini work closely, they have ideological differences. [redacted] Muhammad's belief that Khomeini is the supreme religious guide of the Shias has cost him the support of other Iraqi Shias who demand that the opposition movement be autonomous. Muhammad is in his late thirties and resides in Tehran. [redacted]

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**Mahdi Abd al-Muhsin al-Hakim,  
Leader of the Rabita Ahl al-Bayt**

Mahdi Abd al-Muhsin al-Hakim is the elder brother of Muhammad al-Hakim, the spokesman for the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. During the 1970s, Mahdi and his brothers, Muhammad and Abd al-Aziz, led the Dawa Party. Mahdi, however, subsequently broke with the party and settled in London, where he leads the Rabita Ahl al-Bayt, an Iraqi exile group advocating a freely elected secular Iraqi Government dominated by Shias. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Mahdi believes that the Iraqi populace would not support an Islamic republic similar to Iran's. He publishes anti-Ba'thist propaganda and serves as the Shia opposition movement's liaison with foreign governments. Libya and Syria aid Mahdi's organization, as do wealthy Shias in the Persian Gulf states, [REDACTED] Mahdi's political orientation, however, alienates him from the Iranian Government—the major supporter of Shia oppositionists—and his operation in the United Kingdom is too far from Iraq to give him much access to the Shia opposition's power base or to allow him to become the opposition's paramount actor. He is about 40. [REDACTED]

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**Mas'ud and Idris Barzani,  
Leaders of the Kurdish  
Democratic Party**

Mas'ud Barzani was elected head of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), Iraq's oldest and largest Kurdish dissident group, following the death in 1979 of his father, Mulla Mustafa Barzani. Idris, the second-ranking KDP official, acts as the organization's spokesman and main contact with other Iraqi dissident organizations and the Governments of Iran, Syria, and Libya. The brothers are conducting a guerrilla campaign to create an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq. The Barzanis have collaborated with the Iranian Army in the Iran-Iraq war, kidnaped foreign technicians in Iraq, and attacked loyalist Kurdish groups, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The US Interests Section reports that, although the Barzanis are respected in rural Kurdistan, their actions have cost them the support of anti-Khomeini Kurds throughout Iraq. Idris, about 40, is two years older than Mas'ud. [REDACTED]

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**Jalal Talabani,  
Secretary General of the  
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan**

Intelligent and opportunistic, Jalal Talabani has led the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) since he broke from the Kurdish Democratic Party in 1975. [ ]

[ ] Talabani's lifelong ambition has been to become the political leader of an autonomous Kurdistan within a federated Iraq. Although he is a skilled and experienced military commander, Talabani believes that negotiations with the Saddam Husayn regime are the only way to achieve Kurdish goals, and he has been personally involved in talks with the government to that end. [ ]

[ ] Talabani works closely with Abdol Rahman Qasemlu, a major Iranian Kurdish rebel leader. Talabani, who is about 51, holds a law degree. [ ]

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**Aziz Muhammad,  
Secretary General of the  
Communist Party of Iraq**

Aziz Muhammad, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Iraq since 1964, leads the mainstream pro-Soviet faction of the party. [ ]

[ ] during the past year Muhammad has been preoccupied with trying to balance conflicting factions within the party. [ ]

[ ] Muhammad wants to unite these groups to strengthen the party and prevent the factions from collaborating with the regime. [ ]

[ ] however, Moscow is pressing Muhammad to reconcile with the government. [ ]

[ ] Soviet support and enthusiasm for Muhammad have waned in view of the party's ineffectiveness and Moscow's warming relations with Baghdad. Muhammad joined the party in the early 1940s and has been a member of the Politburo since 1959. A Sunni Kurd, he works closely with Kurdish Democratic Party leader Mas'ud Barzani. Muhammad, 60, is chronically ill and divides his time between Moscow and Damascus. [ ]

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